

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0125

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 6474

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PFOR, CI

SUBJECT: CHILEAN TRAINING SHIP "ESMERALDA"

REF: STATE 164240

1. SUMMARY. IT WILL COME AS NO SURPRISE TO THE DEPARTMENT THAT MORE THAN TWO AND A HALF YEARS AFTER THE EVENT THE EMBASSY CAN REACH NO DEFINITIVE JUDGMENTS ON THE TRUTH OF ACCUSATIONS ABOUT TORTURE ON THE CHILEAN NAVY TRAINING BARKENTINE "ESMERALDA" FOLLOWING THE SEPTEMBER 1973 COUP. WE BELIEVE PERSONS WERE DETAINED ON THE VESSEL TEMPORARILY. WE CAN ALSO SAY THAT THE ESMERALDA AT THE TIME DID NOT ACHIEVE THE NOTORIETY OF MANY OTHER PLACES WHERE WE DO BELIEVE SECURITY FORCES ABUSED PERSONS IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE COUP. MOREOVER, THE PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF ALLEGATIONS ABOUT THE ESMERALDA STEM FROM A GROUP OF SEVEN PERSONS DETAINED AT VALPARAISO. AMONG THEM WERE A NUMBER OF SELF-IDENTIFIED COMMUNISTS WHOSE FIRST LOYALTIES, UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, WAS NOT TO A FACTUAL RECITATION BEFORE THE INTER-AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION IN 1974. OUR JUDGMENT IS THAT THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE ESMERALDA IS LARGELY BASED ON EXAGGERATION. END SUMMARY.

2. WE CONSIDER IT LIKELY THAT PEOPLE WERE IMPRISONED ABOARD THE ESMERALDA IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE COUP. SECURITY FORCES WERE USING EVERY AVAILABLE SITE, PENDING THE PREPARATION OF PERMANENT CENTS OF DETENTION. THE NAVY PUT PRISONERS ABOARD A
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NUMBER OF VESSELS IN VALPARAISO DURING THOSE FIRST FEW DAYS.

WE HAVE FOUND NOTHING SPECIFIC IN OUR FILES ABOUT ESMERALDA, BUT THE EMBASSY'S COLLECTIVE RECOLLECTION INCLUDES A REPORT FROM A GOOD SOURCE AT THE TIME THAT A LIMITED NUMBER OF PEOPLE WERE KEPT ON THE ESMERALDA SOON AFTER THE COUP. ALL WERE REPORTED TO BE WOMEN. IN ADDITION, A NUMBER OF MALE PRISONERS, APPARENTLY IN GOOD CONDITION, WERE OBSERVED ABOARD A MERCHANT SHIP BERTHED AT THE SAME PIER, BUT AT A LATER TIME. THERE IS ALSO A VAGUE RECOLLECTION OF RUMORS THAT SOME IMPORTANT PRISONERS WERE HELD BRIEFLY ABOARD THE ESMERALDA, BUT NO RECOLLECTION AT ALL THAT THE VESSEL WAS OR WAS RUMORED TO BE USED AS A TORTURE CENTER.

3. WE HAVE REREAD THE 1974 REPORT OF THE IAHRC AND IDENTIFIED THE REFERENCES CITED IN THE JACK ANDERSON ARTICLE OF JUNE 10. WE NOTE THAT THE COMMISSION LISTS THE ESMERALDA AMONG FIVE PLACES "THE GOC REFUSED PERMISSION FOR THEM TO INVESTIGATE." IN A REBUTTAL STATEMENT, THE GOC SAID THAT SHE WAS OFF THE WEST COAST OF THE U.S. DURING THE COMMISSION'S VISIT TO CHILE (OAS CP/385/74, P. 47).

4. THE REFERENCES TO THE ESMERALDA IN THE 1974 REPORT CAME FROM A TAPED INTERVIEW OF JULY 27, 1974, WHEN THE FIVE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION VISITED RITOQUE DETENTION CAMP NEAR VALPARAISO. TWO OF THE DETAINEES TOLD OF BEING TORTURED ON BOARD THE VESSEL BEFORE BEING TAKEN TO DAWSON ISLAND. BOTH REFERRED TO A GROUP OF SEVEN PERSONS ARRESTED IN VALPARAISO, AND ONE SAID ALL SEVEN HAD BEEN TORTURED ON THE VESSEL. HE IDENTIFIED HIMSELF AS SERGIO VUSCOVIC ROJO, THE COMMUNIST MAYOR OF VALPARAISO. THE OTHER DID NOT IDENTIFY HIMSELF.

5. LUIS VEGA CONTRERAS, AMONG THOSE BEING HELD AT RITOQUE IN JULY 1974, WAS QUOTED IN THE JACK ANDERSON ARTICLE. HE WAS ALSO THE SUBJECT OF CONGRESSIONAL CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT AND SENATOR HUMPHREY AND CONGRESSMAN UDALL IN JANUARY 1975. WASHINGTON AGENCIES HAVE EXTENSIVE INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON VEGA. HE WAS A WELL KNOWN COMMUNIST WITH TIES TO CHINESE AND OTHER EXTREMIST GROUPS. HIS VERACITY IS THEREFORE VERY QUESTIONABLE.

6. RADIO MOSCOW ON JUNE 29, 1976, BROADCAST A LENGTHY ACCOUNT
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OF DR. ALBERTO ENRIQUE NEUMAN, WHO WAS EMPLOYED IN VA VALPARAISO HOSPITAL UNTIL THE COUP. IN HIS BROADCAST TESTIMONY OF TORTURE ABOARD THE ESMERALDA HE NAMED MAXIMILIANO MARCOS, SOCIALIST LEADER; VUSCOVIC; DEPUTY ANDRES SEPULVEDA, SOCIALIST; AND VINA DEL MAR SOCIALIST ARIEL TAQUIS AS AMONG THOSE SUBJECTED TO TORTURE ON THE SHIP. EMBASSY FILES SHOW NEUMANN TO HAVE BEEN A COMMUNIST PARTY MEMBER SINCE 1966. HE WAS NOT AMONG THOSE LISTED BY THE IAHRC AS IN RITOQUE DURING THE JULY 1974

MEETING.

7. THE EMBASSY DOES NOT EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY THAT PRISONERS ON THE ESMERALDA WERE MISTREATED OR TORTURED. CERTAINLY THE PUBLIC TESTIMONY IS DETAILED AND GRAPHIC. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT THE SOURCES OF THE ACCOUNTS HAVE STRONG REASONS TO FABRICATE OR GREATLY EXAGGERATE EXAMPLES OF MISTREATMENT. WE SUGGEST THAT THEIR ACCOUNTS BE TAKEN WITH MUCH CAUTION.
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